

What Makes an Online Learning Experience Successful?



1. **Have a supportive network.**

The ideal situation is to have a parent or other responsible adult available during the student's time online. This allows the students to gain immediate assistance and provides accountability for working diligently. Even if parents or guardians are not able to be physically present when students are working online, they can still have a significant impact by monitoring student performance, checking in with teachers and discussing lessons and activities with the student.

2. **Be comfortable with technology.**

The virtual classroom requires at least a basic working knowledge of navigating both a computer and various programs. When students lack knowledge or resources related to technology, their education takes a backseat while they learn to navigate it. Caretakers may need to learn along with or guide students in mastering technology or have someone available to help.

3. **Be (them)Self: self-motivated, self-directed and self-disciplined.**

With the freedom and flexibility of the online environment comes responsibility. The online process takes a real commitment and discipline to keep up with the flow of the process and to stay focused. Students who lack internal motivation will require caretakers who can provide the structure and focus they need. Additionally, there should be a quiet, dedicated space and a routine or uninterrupted time each day established to assist with creating the optimal learning environment.

4. **Be willing to "speak up" if problems arise.**

Communicate, communicate, communicate! Many of the non-verbal communication mechanisms that instructors use in determining whether students are having problems (confusion, frustration, boredom, absence, etc.) are not possible in the online setting. If a student is experiencing difficulty on any level (either with the technology or with the course content), he or she must communicate this immediately. Otherwise the instructor, advisor and/or caretaker will never know what is wrong. Barriers to learning such as money, time, medical needs, etc. should also be communicated so that resources and support can be effectively accessed.

5. **Be willing and able to commit to 4-5 hours per week per course.**

Online is not easier than the traditional educational process. In fact, many students will say it requires much more time and commitment. The requirements for online education are no less than that of any other quality educational program. The successful student will view online as a *convenient* way to receive their education – not an *easier* way. If a student (or caretaker) cannot see the value in education, online learning won't change that.

6. **Be able to communicate through writing and learn visually.**

In the Virtual Classroom, nearly all communication is written, so it is critical that students feel comfortable in expressing themselves in writing. Many students have limited writing abilities, which should be addressed before or as part of the online experience. This may require remedial efforts on the part of the student and support from caretakers. Nearly all learning is visually presented so students who are typically auditory or “hands on” learners may have difficulty adjusting. Caretakers may need to read aloud or demonstrate concepts to facilitate learning.

7. **Be committed to the end result.**

Whether it's a diploma, time for personal activities, ability to work independently, the reason for participating in a virtual program must be clear and motivating enough to stay with it. There should be a meaningful reason that the student has switched to an alternative learning environment. Simply pursuing online learning to escape a difficult situation or avoid something may allow for temporary satisfaction but the underlying needs or issues are still there and not resolved.

8. **Be able to think ideas through before responding or quitting and seek solutions as soon as problems arise.**

Meaningful and quality input into the virtual classroom is an essential part of the learning process. Time is given in the process to allow for the careful consideration of responses. Quickly submitting work without really understanding it will lead to poor grades and affects future motivation. Be willing to find solutions to barriers rather than give up or take the easy way out.

9. **Feel that high quality learning can take place without going to a traditional classroom.**

If the student feels that a traditional classroom is a prerequisite to learning, they may be more comfortable in the traditional classroom. Online is not for everybody. A student that wants to be on a traditional campus attending a traditional classroom is probably not going to be happy online. While the level of social interaction can be very high in the virtual classroom given that many barriers come down in the online format, it is not the same as classroom, cafeteria or assembly. This should be made known. An online student is expected to:

- Participate in the virtual classroom 5-7 days a week
- Be able to work independently and/or have necessary supports
- Be able to use the technology properly
- Be able to meet the minimum standards as set forth by the program
- Be able to complete assignments on time
- Enjoy communicating in writing and learning visually

The online learning process is normally accelerated and requires **commitment** on the student's AND caretaker's parts. Staying up with the class and completing all work on time is vital. Once a student gets behind, it is defeating and difficult to catch up. Basically, the student **must** want to be there, and **must** want the experience.